

April 30, 2012

News Release

For Immediate Release

City Council Summary

Smoking Ban Amendments

The Springfield City Council met today to consider two omnibus bills that incorporate proposed amendments to the current smoking ban. One bill, sponsored by Councilpersons Bob Stephens and Cynthia Rushefsky, creates exemptions for electronic cigarettes from the ban and allows smoking as part of theatrical performances. It also has exemptions for tobacco shops, private clubs and bingo halls that are “grandfathered” or having been existence meeting certain criteria, prior to the 2011 ban. A second bill, sponsored by Councilman Doug Burlison, provides the same exemptions, but also exempts bars.

The public hearing will be held over for the May 7 Council meeting, where a vote could take place. Any changes to the smoking ban must be approved unanimously.

A repeal of the ban, brought forth by an initiative petition process, goes to voters in June.

Charter Change Proposals

Council also received updates from City staff on two bills approved by the Plans and Policies committee for Council consideration. The two bills would modify the City’s charter, which will ultimately require a vote of the people.

The first bill addresses a desire to eliminate the need and expense of a primary for City Council elections. Existing charter language requires that a primary take place the second Tuesday in February if there are three or more candidates for one council seat.

The second bill raises the bar on the initiative petition process, requiring more signatures to get a ballot initiative. Currently, the charter requires signatures from 10% of the number of people who voted in the most recent municipal election. For the smoking ban repeal initiative, that number was only 2,101 signatures. The proposed change would require signatures from at least 10% of the total of registered voters. Based on today’s voter registration, that would be around 10,000 signatures. Councilman Burlison mentioned in today’s meeting he might make a motion to amend that to 5%, or 5,000 signatures.

Other changes proposed to the initiative petition process include a requirement of petitioners to form a petition committee and advisory review by both the City’s law and finance departments. Law would render a legal opinion and finance - an opinion on estimated implementation cost and anticipated funding source.

Finally, the bill also Council to amend an initiative petition by a super majority (7) if the petition contains matter that is facially invalid from a legal standpoint and addresses the timing of when an approved petition would be placed on the ballot. A fiscal note would also be required in the ballot language, so that voters have a clear understanding of the anticipated implementation costs to City government, and designated anticipated funding source.

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